

For Your Information

July 29, 2013 | By [Katrina Lantos Swett](#)

*The following appeared in the [Georgetown Journal of International Affairs](#) on July 24, 2013:*

On July 25, Vietnam's President Truong Tan Sang meets President Obama at the White House, even as continued violations of religious freedom and related human rights back in Vietnam negatively complicate the relationship between our two countries.

As documented in this year's [Annual Report](#) of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Vietnam's government shows no signs of loosening its iron grip over religious activities across the nation, as it continues to severely restrict independent religious practice and repress individuals and groups it deems a challenge to its authority. The government deploys a specialized religious police force and uses ill-defined national security laws to suppress independent Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai practices, while aiming to stifle the growth of ethnic minority Protestantism and Catholicism through violence, discrimination, and compulsory renunciations of faith.

The regime also threatens, intimidates, detains, sentences, and disbars lawyers who have defended human rights by representing religious communities or human rights and religious freedom advocates in cases against the state. In December 2012, Vietnamese authorities arrested Le Quoc Quan, an attorney and human rights defender who has helped Vietnamese Catholics in seeking return of church properties. They are now holding Mr. Quan incommunicado in Hoa Lo Prison and denying him access to his own lawyer or family. In 2010, Dr. Cu Huy Ha Vu was charged with propaganda against the state after representing the villagers of Con Dau against the authorities' land grab of their village and cemetery. Despite being in poor health, he is now serving a seven-year sentence due to other activities.

Other individuals detained for their religious practice or religious freedom advocacy include Nguyen Cong Chinh, Bui Van Tham, Thuy Vo Thi Thu, Nguyen Van Thanh, Phan Ngoc Tuan, Nguyen Trung Ton, Nguyen Van Lia, Tran Hoi An, Ksor Y Du, Kpa Y Ko, Father Nguyen Van Ly, and Thich Quang Do.

Given these systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief, USCIRF continues to recommend to our State Department that Vietnam be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC), marking it among the worst religious freedom abusers in the world. Though the Commission has been making this recommendation since 2001, the State Department has only recognized Vietnam as a CPC in 2004 and 2005, removing the designation in 2006 because of advances made toward fulfilling a binding agreement.

Following the initial designation of Vietnam as a CPC and increased American and international attention, Vietnam took measured steps to improve religious freedom conditions, including enacting a law banning forced renunciations of faith and releasing dozens of individuals imprisoned in connection with religion or belief. These steps contradict the oft-repeated claim that linking human rights and religious freedom concerns to our bilateral relationship will inevitably be counterproductive. Clearly, if Vietnam reverses its current course

and begins again to improve religious freedom conditions, it can only strengthen the bond between our countries and increase goodwill between our peoples.

This Thursday's state visit with President Truong Tan Sang provides President Obama with an ideal chance to communicate this vital message to Vietnam, for the sake of the fundamental rights of the Vietnamese people and the benefit of our bilateral relationship.

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